



Mashatu Game Sightings September 2007



Saturday 1 Sept

Our aim today was to track cheetah and we saw cheetahs galore. Our first sighting was at Agate's Koppie where we found a female cheetah resting with her two cubs. They looked thin and clearly were in need of a feed. Although resting on the ground, the mother was attentively listening and observing. Suddenly she rose and began to walk silently towards the hill nearby, on top, where some impala were browsing. Her cubs followed in single file. Every now and then they would crouch down low and listen and watch. The mother cheetah began to move once more. This time the male cub decided to break away and moved close past our vehicle to take the left flank of the hill as his mother moved to the right. Unfortunately the young female cub remained crouched low. When she realized that her brother and her mother were both out of her sight, she stood up and stepped forward to search for them. She couldn't see them as they were out of her vision. She stood still and clearly worried, began to call them in a silent whisper. Gradually in desperation her whisper grew stronger, first to a soft call and then a loud squeal. Her sounds alerted the impala herd that now looked very agitated. Luckily the young male cub had come up the other side of the hill to draw the impala towards his mother, so that she could make the kill. As the impala ran towards the mother cheetah, the mother waited patiently for them to come within reach. However, the young female got excited at the sight of the impala coming down the hill and ran towards them. The mother cheetah had no choice but to sprint for them. Her impressive chase was all in vain as the impala dispersed at speed and got away. It seems that whilst the young male cheetah is fast learning how to hunt, his young sister has a long way to go.

Our second sighting of cheetah was near Dispute Corner. Here we saw a mother cheetah with her three cubs. They looked as if they had eaten well and were enjoying a rest. We watched them move closer together under the shade of a tree, each of them facing a different direction as if on the lookout for danger. As we drove under a huge old Mashatu tree we saw a leopard lying on a high branch, with its long tail hanging down. It was in the classic leopard pose, totally relaxed and peaceful.

Our evening drive once more consisted of great sightings of cheetah, two different leopard and of course do not forget the elephants!

Sunday 2 Sept

This morning we found 2 female adult lions at the Vlei resting out in the open. Although their colouring made them quite hard to spot from a distance, once we were close up, we had a great view and watched them for some time. They were very

relaxed and rolled over onto their backs now and then. We also saw a female adult leopard at Moddergat, who was on the move. She completely ignored us and concentrated on whatever scent or signs she could pick up. It was definitely a morning for hyena sightings as we saw 2 female hyenas active at Old Kanda Camp and 3 adult hyenas walking near Eric's Donga. They seemed to be out hunting. On the way back to camp we saw a small group of wildebeest resting on top of a rocky hill. They seemed quite relaxed until the large bull amongst them gave an alarm snort and they all ran off hurriedly.

In the afternoon we saw a female cheetah and 2 sub adults at Hamerkop Crossing. They were feeding on an impala. The mother let the youngsters eat first. They plucked the fur off the impala a bit before biting into the meat. They ate quite noisily and wasted nothing. Luckily there were no other predators around so they could eat in relative peace. We also saw a female cheetah and 3 sub adults at Kanda waterhole, but they were all resting. Later that evening we saw some warthogs and when they saw us they turned and ran, tails held high. We also saw a group of baboons walking along at a very fast pace. They didn't stop at all and seemed to be on their way to somewhere. Other game sightings included duiker, eland, giraffe, impala, wild cats, jackal, kudu, Vervet monkeys, steenbok, wildebeest and zebra.



Monday 3 Sept

In a large Mashatu tree along the riverine we saw a group of baboons. They were climbing in the tree and occasionally stopping to groom each other or feed. The little ones were playing but sometimes there would be a little squabble and then one of the little ones would scream and run for his mother. As the baboons disturbed the branches, a large eland stood at the base of the tree to catch the berries and leaves as they fell.

In the afternoon we found 2 adult female lions feeding on an eland at Nel's Dam. It was a huge eland and likely to last for a few feeds. We found the 2 adult lions and 4 cubs resting at Pete's Pond. They were all lazing around but wide-awake and the little ones were playing. They would slap each other on the head with their huge paws and then wander over to their mother for some attention. We came across 20 elephants browsing at Pole Hill. One of the larger females came to have a look at the vehicle but decided that we were no threat and started feeding again. We watched the elephants taking small branches off the acacia trees with their trunks and having no problems with the thorns. Other game sightings included baboons, bushbuck, eland, giraffe, impala, jackal, kudu, vervet monkey, steenbok, waterbuck, wildebeest and zebra.

Tuesday 4 Sept

This morning we saw a male leopard feeding on a baby eland at Dispute Corner. It tore into the flesh and completely ignored us. We also saw 7 adult hyenas feeding on a baby eland at Braai Koppie. They were very noisy as they all jostled for a bite. When we arrived at Nel's Vlei, we watched 30 elephants walking quietly along. Some of them would turn around and wait for each other. Occasionally they would flap their ears and send dust flying. On the drive back to Main Camp we saw some zebra standing up and looking very alert.

In the afternoon we found a male and female lion at Nel's Dam. They were resting and quite relaxed. We later came across a male adult leopard active at Baboon's Bedroom. He was walking silently through the vegetation at a slow pace and seemed to be hunting. He had a nasty wound on his back and occasionally stopped to lick it. In the darkness we saw 5 adult hyenas active at Braai Koppie. They seemed to be out hunting. Hyena's jaws and muscles are very strong, and they can crack bones easily. They eat fast too. A group of 5 hyenas could catch and eat an impala within a few minutes with nothing much left but maybe some of the horns. Close by the hyenas we saw a pair of Black-Backed Jackals. They were calling out and then ran away quickly when they caught sight of us. We were also fortunate to see a group of springhares, which are also known as the African kangaroo because they stand bolt upright and hop on their two hind feet. Other game sightings included baboons, bushbuck, duiker, eland, giraffe, impala, kudu, vervet monkey, steenbok, warthog, wildebeest, zebra.



Wednesday 5 Sept

In the morning we started off by seeing very little for the first hour or so, other than impala. However, when we arrived at Dispute Corner we saw a cobra coiled up high in a large Mashatu tree. Just as we were leaving, we saw a male leopard gazing down at us from the tree. He was so well hidden amongst the thick tree branches that we almost missed him. At first all we saw was his face leaning over the branch. We drove round to the other side of the tree to get a view of his body and he turned round to face us. Once he saw that we were trying to photograph him, he became shy and turned his back on us. He did seem very relaxed and completely ignored the vehicle. At Dead Croton we found 15 elephants walking silently along, almost in single file. It is surprising how quietly these large animals can move. There were two young babies and a number of juveniles amongst the group. As one of the juvenile elephants passed by our jeep, he turned back and waved his trunk at us in a playful fashion. A couple of Steenbok ran across the road and then went straight ahead of us. They are the smallest antelope here and pair for life. Later that morning we found a journey of Giraffe. There were two large female giraffes and 2 baby giraffes. They were browsing and the youngsters ran off when we approached, closely followed by their mum's. The day's sightings also included baboons, bushbuck, duiker, eland, giraffe, impala, jackal, kudu, vervet monkey, steenbok, waterbuck, warthog, wildebeest and zebra.

Thursday 6 Sept

It was a lovely spring day with a gentle warm breeze and a good day for game sightings. We found the male and female lions at Nel's Dam at almost the same place where they had been sighted on Tuesday. We smelt a rotting carcass before we saw the lions and found the female lion busy feeding on a large eland. The male lion was again resting and quite relaxed. Also at Nel's Dam we saw about 40 elephants walking and browsing. One of the groups included a collared female elephant called Agnes. Agnes and her group were obviously used to seeing vehicles and she and a young juvenile male elephant walked over to our vehicle to greet us by waving their trunks at us. After a while another group of elephants came along and the two groups greeted each other with quiet rumbles and waving of trunks. They clearly were familiar with each other but Agnes, who was the eldest female, was keen to assert her authority and led the two groups as they walked off.

At Church Tree Mashatu we saw a male adult leopard, which climbed up into a Mashatu Tree and then having found a comfortable resting place, gazed down at us. Later in the darkness we saw three adult hyenas. One of them was gnawing at a large eland leg, which had very little meat left on it. When he saw the other two hyenas walk away, he picked up the leg and followed them into the bush. Other game sightings included duiker, eland, giraffe, impala, jackal, kudu, vervet monkey, steenbok, wildebeest, warthog and zebra.

Friday 7 Sept

It was a very windy and overcast day and we decided to go to Majale Island. It was a good choice as we saw several herds of elephants come and go as they walked and browsed amongst the dense vegetation. They had obviously decided to get some shelter from the wind. Over a period of about an hour we must have seen about 200 elephants altogether. One group of elephants lingered for quite a while, spraying sand over themselves with their trunks and until their coats were quite reddish brown in colour. After a while a small baby decided it had had enough of the sand and lay down at its mother's feet. Another small herd of elephants included two juvenile bulls which spent quite some time fighting each other in a playful way, although from time to time one of them would get a bit upset and rumble. At Pete's Pond we saw the four baby lion cubs of the Majale Island Pride with their grandmother. They were resting and waiting for the mother to return. At Crocodile Pool we were lucky to catch sight of a female sub adult leopard that was resting high in a tree. A male adult leopard was also seen resting in a tree at Hamerkop. It watched us for a while and then decided to turn its back on us. Later in the day we also saw a female adult hyena hunting and we heard the sound of other hyenas nearby. There were also good sightings of large groups of eland and kudu bulls. The day's sightings also included baboons, giraffe, impala, jackal, vervet monkey, steenbok, warthog, wildebeest and zebra.

Saturday 8 Sept

Fortunately the wind had dropped overnight and it was a good day for game viewing. Crossing the Malaje River near Hamerkop Crossing our ranger spotted fresh lion tracks and we started tracking. We came across the Elephant Valley pride lying on the bank of the Majale River close to Dispute Corner. A young male lion had joined the group. Our ranger indicated that he is a previous son of the lioness. While we watched the pride a small bachelor herd of impala came down to drink. This got the attention of the whole pride and every lion was looking in the same direction. In a split second one of the sub adults had dashed down the bank and was charging at the impalas, but alas with no success and the young lioness returned to the rest of her pride. From here we set off to find some elephants. On Majale Island we spotted first the small family of Diana, and soon noticed more and more elephants. They seemed to have appeared out of nowhere and it was not long before elephants surrounded us. There were several young babies in the group and a few of the young bulls were testing their strength against each other. General game was plentiful and we saw everything from a steenbok, to a grey duiker to the largest antelope – the eland.

On our evening drive we once more visited the Elephant Valley pride. They had not moved an inch from this morning and were still fast asleep when we arrived. Not far from the lions we came across a family of 15 elephants walking leisurely while browsing on the plentiful Acacia trees in the area. The highlight of the evening though was a porcupine just after dark, just strolling past the vehicle.



Sunday, 9 September

It was a morning for elephant sightings with three different groups of elephants to be seen on the morning drive. Near Cheetahs Koppie we encountered a small family of elephants heading towards the Croton thicket along the Majale River, while another herd of elephants was spotted drinking within the Pitsane River near Bryce's store. Two young male leopards were also seen feeding on an unfortunate impala near Crocodile Pool along the Majale River. On our return from the morning drive we met up with a small family of elephants drinking at the Main Camp waterhole. General game was plentiful and we saw a bachelor group of several large kudu bulls with magnificent horns, a troop of baboons foraging in the open veld, a pair of steenbok in the shade of a torn tree and many more.



On the evening drive we visited the two young male leopard again near Hamerkop Crossing, by now little was left of the impala and the carcass hang abandoned in the tree. During the night drive we spotted a porcupine scurrying quickly into the darkness, an African wild cat on the hunt and a large spotted genet moving about in an Acacia tree.

Monday, 10 September

This morning we tracked down the Elephant Valley pride near Bryce's store resting in the early morning sun. Not far from the lions a small group of hyenas were on the move. A herd of 75 elephants came walking down the Pitsane River and was seen near Pitsane Koppie. The two young male leopards had gone their separate routes and one male was seen near Crocodile pool, while the other was on the move near Hamerkop Crossing.

During the afternoon drive we visited the Elephant Valley pride again. They have not moved 2 inches from their position this morning! The two male leopards were also seen to be still in their respective areas.

Tuesday, 11 September

The Elephant Valley pride had moved over night from the Pitsane River down towards the Majale River and we managed to track them all the way to Dispute Corner where the whole family was fast asleep on the banks of the river. A big male giraffe had died of old age near McNiels pool and by this morning a pack of 12 hyenas have moved in and were feeding on the giraffe carcass. Elephants were also around and two separate groups were seen near Dead Croton and south of Nel's windmill.

What an amazing afternoon drive - we saw all the different predators including a group of 3 cheetahs near Pole Hill. By now the number of hyenas on the giraffe kill had increased and we watched for a long time as they fought and called around the carcass, a very eerie sound. A magnificent male leopard was seen near Baboons Bedroom while one of the young male leopards was still near Hamerkop Crossing along the Majale River.

Wednesday, 12 September

The highlight this morning on the drive was watching the mating dance of a male ostrich. Watching him wave and move his wings in such a coordinated manner was amazing! This morning the cheetahs had caught an impala and by the time we located them east of Pole Hill they were feeding eagerly on the kill. A leopard at Gabions and two different groups of elephants along the Vlei and near Moddergat respectively made up the sightings on the morning drive.

Once more we visited the dead giraffe and by now over 15 hyenas were feeding on the carcass. Vultures had also moved in for their share of the "kill". The cheetahs were still near Pole Hill. Elephants once more - with herds near Gabions, at Quelea Colony and close to the Nyaswe Borehole. Two different sightings of leopards were had near McNiels Pool and east of Three Mashatu Dam ending off a wonderful evening's drive.



Thursday, 13 September

Arriving at the Majale River our ranger, Joe, pointed to a leopard curled up amongst the rocks in the riverbed. It was a young male and as soon as we tried to approach he got up and moved away. It was the injured young male and possibly the reason why he was nervous. Driving along the Majale River we arrived at a small pool in the river called Dispute Corner. Here we saw hundreds of guinea fowl gathering together, all squabbling for a drink in the little pool. Some of the guinea fowls were sitting high up on a tree, others running around in the riverbed, drinking from holes dug by elephant, while yet other was coming down the bank towards the water. A herd of impalas also tried to get their share of the remaining water paying the guinea fowl little attention. Not far from the Majale River we came across our first herd of elephants for the morning. The herd was identified as that of Funny face. We spent a long time with the herd and as soon as we moved off another herd approached. This time it was the herd of Hestelle, a very old and well-loved matriarch. Her herd moved into the Acacia veld near the Majale River and here several of the individuals fell asleep, standing with their eyes closed and trunks resting on the ground gently swaying from side to side.

On route back to camp we encountered yet another young male leopard. This time, however, the male was very relaxed and did not seem to be bothered one bit by the vehicles. The Majale Island pride was once again seen near the Vlei, lots of hyenas and vultures at the giraffe carcass and two different leopards made of the rest of the game viewing for the day together with great sightings of ostriches, eland, kudus, impalas and warthogs.

Friday, 14 September

This morning we set out with the resident elephant researcher, Jeanetta, in search of her charges. It was a long drive before we came across a group of elephants browsing on the many Acacia trees in the area. The herd was located just east of the vlei and Jeanetta identified the group as Small Lumps herd. Small lump was facing us while feeding non-stop on an Umbrella thorn. A small lump was visible on her right side. While watching and learning more about this specific herd we heard the trumpets and rumbles of another herd approaching. After a while we set off to see who had arrived in the same area. On a small elevation we came across Therese and her group of about 40 elephants and again they were munching away on the Acacia trees. Within this group there was two little ones and one huge bull with a broken tusk. Several younger bulls were following close behind. General game was plentiful and we came across a group of several large eland bulls, ostriches, a pair of black backed jackals, kudus, impalas and lots and lots of guinea fowls.

Saturday, 15 September

A wonderful day of game viewing with a male leopard high up in Mashatu tree near the Majale River scanning his kingdom from the vantage point of a high branch, to several herds of elephants scattered all over the reserve. Amongst these groups was the herd of Hestelle. Near the White cliffs two bush pigs were seen huddling together for warmth early in the morning. We watched a troop of banded mongoose as they rushed across the road to several large eland bulls browsing quietly in the riverine thicket. The Majale Island pride was still in the vicinity of the Limpopo River, while within the vlei several families of warthogs were seen feeding.



Sunday 23 September 2007

Afternoon drive

It was a hot sunny day, the maximum temperature this afternoon was 43 degrees Celsius. We didn't expect to see much due to the heat but we started off with a very good sighting of giraffes with wildebeest and zebra resting in the shade of some trees in the distance.

At Uitspan we were lucky and saw the Elephant Valley Pride of lions. They too were resting and that gave us some time to have a good look at them. It is a wonderful experience to be able to be so close to these animals. On top of a small hill we saw a large herd of around 100 impala and when we were close to Camp, we saw a few Spring Hares hopping away from us in the dark.

Monday 24 September 2007

This morning we found the sub-adult female of the Elephant Valley Pride on her own at Cheetah Koppie. She was resting under a bush and we watched her for a while. At Fig Tree Crossing we were watching a herd of 15 elephants slowly walking on while quietly browsing, when suddenly we discovered a young male leopard resting on a branch up a tree. He was looking down on the elephants, but neither of them seemed to be worried about the other being there - and we enjoyed watching this!

Near the MJ water tanks we saw 2 Hyena's. They walked quietly through the bush, sniffing the ground and keeping an eye on us. Suddenly they started running and in a few seconds they were gone.

Tuesday 25 September 2007

Morning drive

The young Elephant Valley Pride lioness was still at Cheetah Koppie and still on her own. We found her resting under a bush; she was looking around, but didn't seem to be worried about us being there.

While we were driving through a dry river bed, we saw a Common Duiker run away. While we were looking at it, we discovered a few kudu nearby - females and a large male with huge horns, very impressive.

We drove past a rocky cliff and saw some dassies there. They looked down on us, whistled an alarm and ran for cover. A few seconds later we saw little faces appear everywhere, checking to see where we were and watching us from above, very cute indeed.

Afternoon drive

We saw a herd of eland this afternoon. There was a large bull with the females and he had a wonderful grey colour. His forehead was full of mud and he really looked impressive. A Jackal was heard calling and we got a quick glimpse of it when it trotted away, they have lovely bushy tails.

At Dispute Corner we watched a herd of 20 Elephants. They were browsing and we watched how they carefully ate very thorny branches. One of the Elephants was busy breaking a little bit off a dead branch on the ground. It put its trunk around it and bent the branch until it broke. Then it put its feet on the large branch and pulled the little piece off. It walked away while chewing on the little stick.

We drove to Three Mashatu and there we found a hyena feeding on an impala and a leopard walking close by. Who caught this impala we'll never know, but the hyena was certainly in charge of it now.

Wednesday 26 September 2007

Morning drive

We drove to the Vlei and found the Majale Island pride of lions there. The two females were resting, but the four cubs were quite active, playing and tumbling all over each other. The two females got up and all of them walked off.

Near Nels Windmill we saw a herd of 50 Elephants with 2 large bulls with them. The herd was browsing and the bulls were walking slowly amongst them, keeping a careful eye on each other.

At McNeils pool we watched 2 hyena's feeding on the dead male giraffe. The giraffe was of a respectable age and he spent quite some time in the area before he died.

Afternoon drive

This afternoons drive was very exciting... not only did we find the Majale Island Pride of lions at the Vlei again, but we also saw the female of the Elephant Valley Pride at Dispute corner! And to make it even more exciting, we found a female leopard at White Cliffs. She was walking in the dry river bed and it was very hard to spot her, they are so well camouflaged.

At Crocodile Pool we watched a herd of 15 Elephants feeding. They were eating thorny branches and dead leaves; it is a bit of a hard time for them at the end of winter.

When we got back to Main Camp there was a hyena drinking at the waterhole and we watched it for quite some time. Soon after it left we heard the hyena call.



Thursday 27 September 2007

Morning drive

There was a lot of wind this morning and the dust was flying. We found the Elephant Valley Pride lioness at Wallow; she was prowling around and kept an eye on our vehicle. A small herd of impala was resting in the shade of a tree while a pair of Jackals walked past. The impala's didn't seem to be worried about them, but when the baby Impala's are being born the impala will not tolerate the Jackals anywhere near them as Jackals sometimes catch the little ones. When we drove over

Beacon Hill we saw a herd of 20 Elephants slowly walking towards the dry river. There was a young bull with them that shook his head at us.

Afternoon drive

The female of the Elephant Valley Pride was still at Wallow, but this time we found her resting under a bush. She was snoozing and seemed relaxed. When we drove past Rock Camp we saw a young male leopard walking along the dirt road. We had a good view of the curled tip of his tail with the bright white inside. At the Vlei we found the Majale Island Pride of lions. They were all feeding on a kudu kill, trying to eat as much as they could. The grandmother of the pride, Nkoko, stopped feeding and lay down to rest. We heard the barking of a Baboon group nearby. Driving back to camp we saw a large herd of Eland with a crèche of calves. There were also a few very big bulls in the herd.

The sunset this evening was beautiful, probably due to the dust in the air from the windy day.

Friday 28 September 2007

Morning drive

Now this was a surprise, we had rain this morning! And it was cool and windy. Having rain in September is exceptional and we were very happy to get it. It will make the grass grow a little and help the animals through the tough late winter days. We waited for a while and left on our game drive after the rain had stopped. We saw a small herd of 16 elephants moving into the hills in a determined way. Our tracker mentioned that elephants do this when the rain comes and the river floods. We had 8 mm of rain that morning and that would not be enough for the river to flow. We watched the elephants walk on and went back to camp for hot tea and coffee and a delicious brunch.

Afternoon drive.

It had been raining on and off all day with thunder and lightening and a lot of wind. We had 88mm of rain during the day! But eventually the rain stopped and we left for a drive to see how the bush looked after the rains. We saw one elephant at Three Mashatu, but it walked on quickly and we couldn't follow it. Near Beacon Hill we found a three meter long Python! It was huge and beautifully marked. But the rain, thunder and lightening started again and although it was a magnificent sight, we had to go back to camp, soaked but happy. What a special experience we had! The bush looked so different... no dust, puddles of water everywhere and the colours were completely different.

Saturday 29 September 2007

We woke up with a new sound in the background, the sound of water. The river was full and flowing with impressive power! At Main Camp we had a strong stream right under the terrace and a waterfall too. Needless to say there was no game drive, but we did check the river, and that was impressive. The huge mass of water coming down with such power is truly amazing to see. One day you drive through a dry river bed and the next day you find a huge river there!

We went out for a short drive that afternoon to see the river and the changes in the bush, but we had to come back to Camp soon as the roads were very wet and we didn't want to damage them. We did see 20 elephants at Baboons Bedroom, wildebeest and zebra along the road and baboons near Main Camp.

Sunday 30 September 2007

Morning drive

The total amount of rain we had turned out to be 124mm and the effect on the bush was amazing. Our guides told us the bush will be green in a week and the herbivores will be able to feed well again soon. The river had gone down quite a bit and the new guests were able to get through the river in the Unimog with the help of a tractor. That was a spectacular arrival!

On the morning drive we found the Majale Island Pride of lions at Vlei. The Vlei looks completely different now... water all around, just beautiful. We saw baboons, eland, giraffe, jackal, steenbok, warthog, wildebeest and zebra and all animals looked different, cleaner, washed and with deeper colours. The roads were still very wet and damaged easily, so we went back to camp early for brunch.